

10Nov70

The Director

GACarver, Jr.

I am returning herewith your copy of the post mortem plus the memorandum I mentioned in our 10 November conversation. The latter has been sent to no one but you as of this writing.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachments

10 November 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Sihanoukville Post Mortem

1. At your request, I have read the Sihanoukville post mortem carefully. It is a solid, thorough, conscientious piece of work generally frank and candid and commendably (though not entirely) free of a defensive tone or the subliminal imputation that it is better to have been wrong for the right reasons than right for the wrong reasons. On balance, I think it would be useful (instructionally and politically) to give it to Admiral Anderson and Dr. Kissinger.

2. I do, however, have one caveat whose subjective or cosmetic importance you should weigh in your own mind. In addition to -- or behind -- the evidence problems the post mortem admirably and forthrightly analyzes, there are/were two key judgments or basic working assumptions which shaped OER's outlook, handling of the evidence, and conclusions. One of these is frankly faced up to and candidly addressed. The other is alluded to, but never really looked squarely in the face. The two assumptions in question relate to (a) shipping/port offloading data and (b) the role of the overland route through Laos. The former is quite adequately handled in the post mortem but the treatment of the latter could be open to challenge.

3. In both instances, hindsight (illuminated by the evidence now in hand) shows we were led astray by capability judgments which became controlling assumptions that took conscious or unconscious precedence over judgments regarding intentions or actual performance and, further, probably did cause OER's analysts to be a shade more critically rigorous in weighing evidence that contravened these assumptions than evidence which tended to support them. On the shipping and port issue, the matter is quite clear and clearly handled in the post mortem. We carefully developed a model on the port of Sihanoukville's cargo handling capabilities. This model was ingenious and logically impeccable. Unfortunately, it bore little relationship to concrete reality. To be

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